JOHNSON, OF THE NINTH,

By WILLIAM ELLIS.

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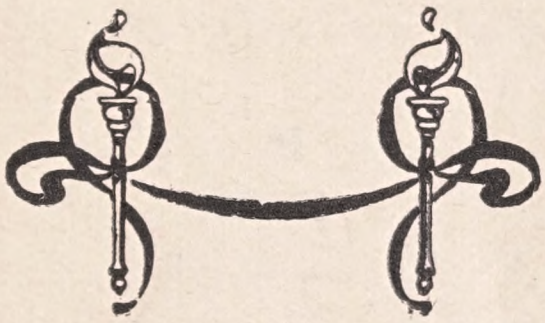

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JOHNSON, OF THE NINTH.

FREDERICK WILSON, private secretary to Governor Henry Warfield, was at his desk rather earlier than usual one morning, when the door was opened, and what would have been to almost any other man a vision of loveliness in a well-cut tailor-made gown burst upon the scene. But Wilson was young, and there was but one vision of loveliness for him. That one was miles away, and he was, at the moment, reading a letter from her.

For a moment his caller stood in the doorway as if half expecting to be ordered out. A charming woman often has the trick of assuming the impossible. This woman was a distinguished member of the third house, and the Legislature was in session.

She had plenty of money, and went into politics for the enjoyment of it, so she said. Her efforts, for the most part, had been devoted to lobbying earnestly for several utterly impossible bills which were ostensibly intended to ameliorate the condition of womankind in varying degrees of misfortune.

She approached Wilson with a general bearing which was well-nigh irresistible. But Wilson was fortified with the photograph of a very plain and ordinary face and an accumulation of letters in a very cramped and schoolgirlish hand, which meant to him everything in the way of womanhood which Miss Ellsworth did not—and that was very much.

"Good morning, Mr. Wilson," said Miss Ellsworth, and her voice bore out the general impression of her manner. "I hope I do not come too early?"

"Not at all, Miss Ellsworth," replied Wilson pleasantly, as he laid his letter aside, inwardly hoping she would depart early.

"Mr. Wilson, can you tell me anything about House File 226 A? That's my bill, you know, to make these large storekeepers furnish seats for the women they employ. I got it through the committee, and it passed the House, and now it's lost somewhere between the House and the Senate. It hasn't got in here by mistake, has it?"

"I haven't seen anything of it, Miss Ellsworth," replied Wilson; "but as soon as the bill clerk comes in I'll have him look it up. I think you will be more likely to find that it's mislaid in the engrossing-room, won't you?"

"Oh, I've been there, and everywhere. My! but it's a lot of work getting a bill through the Legislature, isn't it? How is the Governor coming on with his fight on the railroad repeal bill? I hear he's having quite a time over it."

"Oh, I think he'll come out all right on it," said Wilson in a non-committal sort of tone. He knew that up to within a day or two, certain defeat had stared the Governor

in the face, and that even now he was by no means certain that he could hold in line the votes he had secured on the committee.

Suddenly the whole manner of Miss Ellsworth changed. She leaned forward in her chair just a little to give more force to her words, and in a quiet, strong tone, so different from the light, vivacious manner which usually characterized her that Wilson was impressed with her earnestness, she said:

"Well, he won't. You tell him when he comes in that I know he is beaten on that repeal bill, and beaten by a trick he can never discover until it is too late. I can pull him through, and I want to do it —not for him, but for myself. Please tell him I should like to see him, and that he can send for me any time to-day if he wants to. I shall be either at the hotel or within call all day. Good-morning."

And before Wilson could recover from his astonishment enough to wish her a good-day, the door had closed behind her, and she was gone.

For an instant Wilson was dazed. It was like Galatea come to life. He had suspected from the first that Miss Ellsworth was at the capitol in the railroad lobby; and now she had shown her hand—the last thing he could have anticipated.

The private secretary of a Governor very soon becomes calloused, and eventually petrified—that is, if he serves out the term of his appointment. Wise people know that the secretary is the buffer which is designed to protect the Governor, and so they first make the secretary understand the full importance of their business with the executive. In this way the Governor experiences the greater share of his thrills of excitement vicariously, and the secretary soon becomes as sensitive to spiritual impulse as a phonograph. But this time Wilson was stirred. While he was debating whether he would better go at once to the Governor with the information, or wait till he came to the capitol, he heard the door of the executive chamber open

and close, indicating the arrival of Governor Warfield.

Wilson immediately sought the Governor. "Governor," he began abruptly," I have had a call this morning from Miss Ellsworth."

"Rather early for society, isn't it Wilson?" replied Warfield, smiling.

"It was none too early for this call I imagine" rejoined Wilson, "She says you are beaten on the repeal bill unless she pulls you through, and she wants to help."

The Governor looked out of the window a moment. "What does she know about it?" he asked as he turned to Wilson.

"I don't know; but she says she wants to talk to you."

"Wilson," and the Governor was in an earnest mood, "I shouldn't wonder if she's right. There is a nigger in the woodpile somewhere on that committe. I have been working for a week on the theory that something was wrong, but I haven't

been able to find it. I'll see her, anyway. Have her over here at ten o'clock."

Promptly on the hour Miss Ellsworth made her appearance at the capitol and was ushered into the presence of the Governor.

"Good-morning, Miss Ellsworth," said the Governor pleasantly, as he stepped forward to greet her. "Mr. Wilson tells me that you have something to talk over with us in connection with the railroad bill?"

"I should prefer to talk it over with you alone, Governor," she said, and as she said it she looked him squarely in the eye. Something in her glance spoke eloquently of her sincerity, and, though there was a faint suspicion in his mind of the possibility of a trick, he turned to Wilson and dismissed him.

When the door closed behind Wilson Governor Warfield motioned his caller to a seat, and said with careful distinctness:

"Please be seated, Mrs. Vandenburg."

As he spoke the name she started but she had such complete possession of herself

that her perfect poise was disturbed only for an instant.

"I am glad you know," she said; "it saves such an awkward explanation."

"When there is as close a fight on hand as we have," returned the Governor quietly, "it is well to know all we can."

"Yet I am sure," said Mrs. Vandenburg, "that the one thing that it is vital you should know you do not know. However, you are not here to answer questions, and I shall not ask you. At the risk of having you tell me that you knew it all the time, I shall simply tell you what I came to tell you. You are counting on one vote which, at the last moment, will change to the other side."

It was the Governor's turn now to start. Here was the thing he had been afraid of; now the fear was being reduced to certainty. "Well?" he said, as he waited for her to continue.

"I can put it in your power to stop it," she said quietly, "and I desire to do so

upon only one condition. That is that you save the man."

"You mean from criminal prosecution?" asked Warfield.

"Yes," she answered, and she knew how hopeless it was to attempt to save a wrongdoer through Henry Warfield. But to her this was all-important. "The fact is," she continued, trying to conceal her feeling, "that he has been misled; that he would give the world to be out of it, and that so far, he has not touched a cent of the money that has been paid him. He will gladly give up the money, but he lacks the moral courage to do it by himself. Isn't it better to save him while he can be saved than to make a criminal of him?"

Warfield was conscious that the woman was making the only plea that could touch him. He also realized that he was being honestly and fairly outgeneralled.

"If the bribery can be frustrated, I shall be glad to become a party to doing it," he said after a moment's pause, "but if it has

been consummated I will undertake to see that it is punished."

"Then I have your word that if the money has not been touched, and the man is ready to give it up, and is ready to vote against the repeal, no one shall ever know from you that he took the money?"

"Not from me," repeated the Governor, and for the first time in his political career he had assented to terms dictated by some one else.

"Then," said Mrs. Vandenburg," "I shall rely on your word and give you the information. Albert Johnson will cast his vote in the committee for and not against the repeal of the bill. If the bill is reported for repeal, you cannot save it on the floor."

The Governor knew that was true. He knew the fight must be won or lost in the committee.

"May I suggest a plan for bringing this about?" she ask, as she watched the effect of her information upon Warfield.

"I should be very glad to have your

suggestion," said the Governor, who was coming to have some repect for the political sagacity of this woman lobbyist.

"He was paid five thousand dollars," said Mrs. Vandenburg, and the calm and businesslike manner in which she spoke of the transaction made Warfield shudder slightly, "and that money is now in a safety-deposit box in Chicago. There are two keys to the box, and both are required to open it. Here is one of them," and she walked over and handed it to the Governor, "and he has the other. With one key in your possession you ought to be able to get the other. If you have both keys, that amounts to possession of the money. I know he will be glad to give up the other key."

The Governor was so amazed that he hardly noticed that she had turned to go. She stopped, half-hesitating, but apparently determined to say something she dreaded to say.

"Governor," she began, and her tone had lost the self-assurance and the cold

calm which had characterized it—the lobbyist was disappearing and the woman was coming to the surface, "I want to say just one or two things more. I don't want you to judge me either too harshly or too generously. No woman ought to live in the atmosphere of this sort of thing. No one knows that better than I do. If every woman that chafes at the restraints of womanhood could know what freedom costs, she would hesitate at the door which leads out into the wider liberties. But I do not want you give me credit for any moral revulsion which I do not feel. What I have done this morning has been done only because it is the most complete revenge I can have for the deepest wrong a man can do his wife—the only reason I want to save Johnson is because he is a weak man who has fallen into the hands of one of the most unscrupulous villains that ever lived—I refer now to my husband, Major Vandenburg." And with that she bowed and passed out.

The thing that impressed Warfield most was a feeling of gratitude that she had not cried. He had an idea that all women cried when they felt deeply. As he thought it all over he was almost sorry that she had not; it would have seemed more womanly. But he had time to give only a passing thought to that. The Committee on Railroads was to vote on the repeal bill the next morning, and he knew that every moment and every energy must be given to the direction of that fight.

All day there was clearly something in the air in the vicinity of the executive chamber. Messengers were hurried hither and thither; the telephone and telegraph were kept busy. Every man in the State who could bring any pressure to bear on the members of the committee to bring them into line or to keep them in line was brought to bear on the play. Like a vast chess game; with the counties of the state for squares, the opposing forces were bringing all their resources to bear on the king-

square, when, all unexpected and unforeseen, a little queen's pawn had moved up and uncovered a check that had not been anticipated. The Governor decided to wait till evening for the final move.

The early part of the evening was devoted to a conferance of the leaders of the opposition to the repeal bill, which was held in the executive chamber. The line up of the committee indicated a report against the passage of the bill, and the leaders of the fight were in good humor over the near approach of hard-won victory. There were two, however, who did not enter very heartily into the spirit of the hour, these two were the Governor himself and Mr. Albert Johnson, member from the Ninth District, and Chairman of the Committee on Railroads.

The Governor intimated to his friends that he had some business matters to take up, and the conference dispersed early. As they started to go Warfield called Johnson aside and asked him to stay a moment after

the others had gone. As soon as he and Johnson were alone he stepped to the door and locked it, putting the key in his pocket. This did not escape the observation of Mr. Johnson, who began to feel the compression of the atmosphere which always occurs in close quarters.

"Mr. Johnson," said the governor, by way of opening, "have you any engagements this evening that would preclude your accepting an invitation to spend the night as my guest?"

Johnson understood that the sparring had begun, and he felt that the longer he could stave off the final attack the better it would be. So, with as calm an exterior as he could command, he replied:

"Nothing that I think of, Governor. But isn't this burst of hospitality, a little sudden?" This was added with what was intended for a laugh, but did not prove a conspicuous success.

"Well," said the Governor in a tone that was a little hard and dry, "it may be

sudden, but it is cordial." He could not feel thoroughly at ease in the presence of a man whom he knew had accepted a bribe. "I suppose you are quite pleased," he continued, "to find that we have the four votes we need on your committee? It takes some worry off your mind?" The Governor began to realize how a sleek, well-fed cat feels while she plays with a helpless mouse.

"Yes," replied Johnson, who was feeling just as the mouse does, "it didn't look, for a while, as if we could win out."

"Well," said Warfield, and there was a change in his tone now that even Johnson could not mistake, "we not only can win out, Mr. Johnson, but we shall win out."

"Yes," said Johnson, just a shade more faintly as the Governor grew stronger in tone, "it looks now as if we are all right."

"There is no question in your mind, is there, Johnson, about having the four votes we need?"

"Not if you are sure of the vote you secured yesterday."

"Oh, that vote is all right," replied the Governor. "But you and I know something that none of the others know, Johnson. As you and I sit here at this moment we both know that with the vote I secured yesterday we have only three votes. You and I will have to make it our business to-night to get the fourth vote. Do you think we can get it?"

"Why, you can count on me for anything I can do," said Johnson with an admirable assumption of innocence. "But I don't understand what you mean. I thought you said we had four votes."

"Do you think we have?"

"We have had three all the time, haven't we? And you say you got another one in line yesterday. That makes four, doesn't it?"

"Your mathematics are all right, Johnson," said the Governor with a smile that was lacking in warmth, "but I am afraid

your facts are wrong, Johnson"—the Governor turned suddenly upon his visitor and spoke with force and some vigor, a trick he had learned in cross exmination —"give me the key to that safety-deposit box."

Johnson started, just on the instant, as as if a surgeon operating upon him had let a knife slip and hurt him where he had not expected to be hurt.

"Key to what safety-deposit box?" he asked with all the self-possession he could command.

"Box number three hundred and thirty-two in the Kenmore vaults," said the Governor quietly and firmly.

"See here, Warfield," said Johnson with a sudden show of fight in his manner, "what sort of a bluff are you trying to work on me? you call me in here with you alone, you lock the door and take the key out of it and put it in your pocket, and then you begin to talk mysteriously about votes and safety-deposit boxes, and of course

there's only one inference to be drawn from it all. Now, that sort of thing won't go with me; not one bit. If you have any charges to make against me, this isn't the way to go about it. You open that door and let me go. I don't propose to submit to any such high-handed proceedings as this. It has passed the point of fun."

"So you object to having the door locked? You consider it a restriction of your freedom? Why, Johnson, that door is locked for your protection. Outside the door is a man who has a warrant in his pocket charging John Doe with the crime of bribery, and he has instructions to serve it on the first man who crosses that threshold before me. Here is the key to the door; go out if you want to."

And as Warfield reached out his hand in which was the key to the door, Johnson, of the Ninth, the Chairman of the Committee on Railroads, a leader in the House, sank, pale and trembling and exhausted, into a chair, while great drops of sweat stood

out upon his forehead. So this, then, was the end of it all.

For a few moments—it seemed like years—Warfield stood, silent and fixed. Then he spoke. It was almost as a father, speaking to an erring boy.

"Johnson," he said, and his voice was mellowed with feeling, "sit up, man, and let us talk it all over. I know that money was paid over to you in Chicago; I know that it was put in the safety-deposit vaults. It was too great a chance to take, but you took it, and you lost. Now I will tell you what to do. You have made a great mistake, but no one has suffered from it but you. No wrong has been done except to your own self-respect. It is not too late now to correct the wrong. In the first place, don't you think you'd better give me that key?" The Governor's request for the key now was as kind and tender as it had before been harsh and defiant, and Johnson reached into an inner pocket, took it out and handed it to the Governor without so

much as looking up. Warfield put it into his pocket with its mate, relieved that he had not been forced to expose the fact that he had the other.

"Now," the Governor resumed, "you have, so far as you can up to to this time, purged yourself of the bribery. So far as you are concerned you are through with the money. Now, under no financial or political obligation to any one, and as a free man, go into your committee to-morrow and vote as your conscience dictates. You know as well as I what effort will be made to-night to find you and keep you in line. If you want to go, you may go now with perfect safety. You will not be molested in any way. But if you desire to accept my hospitality for the night I shall be glad to have you do so."

For a moment after the Governor ceased speaking Johnson sat in the attitude of dejection and despair into which he had fallen when the fact that he had been discovered had first overwhelmed him. When

he did rouse up it was with a face that had been blanched in the agony of those few moments, and the voice with which he replied to Warfield was emptied of all the spirit of a man. He was a pitiable thing as he sat there.

"Warfield," he said, "there is only one feeling in my heart at this moment. I am glad you have saved me. I shall never be able to look the world in the face again, and it doesn't seem now as if I could ever get far enough away from it all to live again. But you have done for me what I have been trying to do for weeks. I got into it, and I am a thief, and worse than a—" And here he broke down completely, and sobbed as only a strong man, broken, can sob.

Warfield made no attempt to stay the burst of sorrow which had overcome him. When he spoke, it was still gently and kindly.

"Johnson," he said after a pause, "no one knows anything of this but you and me and those who are in it with you,

Vandenburg won't be apt to say anything; he has some troubles of his own to look after. I say to you, live out of and above this thing, and be the man you can. And so long as you want to you can not only have my help, but you can have my full confidence. I don't think a man will put his hand into the same fire twice. And above all things, understand that I am not attempting to coerce your vote to-morrow; but you are now freed from the necessity of voting for a price."

"Warfield," said Johnson with deep earnestness, "now that I have that load off my mind I want to be perfectly square with you. That key won't unlock the safety-deposit box. It takes two."

"Where is the other one?" asked the Governor quietly.

"I can't tell you," replied Johnson. And he turned his head to avoid the searching glance Warfield gave him.

"Why not?" asked Warfield with quiet persistence.

"A woman has it. A woman who is too good to be mixed up in this kind of business."

"Do you mean Mrs. Vandenburg?" asked the Governor in a low, strong tone.

"How did you know?" cried Johnson, now thoroughly aroused.

"Well, she hasn't got the key," said Warfield; "here it is."

Johnson was overwhelmed as he saw the two keys in Warfield's hand.

"Warfield," he cried, "no harm is coming to her? She's my sister, Warfield —do anything you like with me—but save her—she's had nothing to do with it—"

"No," interrupted the Governor, "this is a case in which we have prevented crime, and you owe it to her that you are not to-night a felon instead of a penitent. Vandenburg is the only one we are after, and I guess the railroads and his wife can take care of him without the aid of the law. Now let's go home and get some rest."

And together they passed out of the

executive chamber, the Governor considerately walking out ahead of his guest.

When the report of the Committee on Railroads on House File No. 6 was read at the opening of the session the next afternoon, the enthusiastic applause, which was promptly suppressed by the sergeant-of-arms, was started in the gallery by a woman whose face beamed with pride in her brother.

When the report had been adopted and the motion to reconsider had been defeated, she went at once to the Major, who was in his rooms at the hotel, surrounded by uncorked bottles of various essential oils popularly supposed to be efficacious in quieting the troubled waves of the political sea. He was gnashing his teeth in rage at the perfidy of Johnson, who had been let in on a good thing wholly through the goodness of the Major himself.

"Well," she said as she entered, "I kept Albert's vote in line for you on the committee, as you may have noticed."

Before Vandenburg could reply the long-distance telephone rang, and the general counsel for the Boundary and Gulf Air Line made some inquiries, in a rather crisp tone, as to what had become of this man Johnson, in whom they supposed they had made a considerable investment.

"He switched on me," was all the explanation Vandenburg could give.

"Well, your salary stopped at 10:15 this morning," replied the general counsel as he hung up the telephone. That was the hour at which the vote of Johnson in the committee had killed the bill.

About a week later Warfield went to Chicago on a little matter of private business, and the next day the Asylum for Foundlings and Indigent Orphans was thrown into a corporate spasm by the receipt of a package containing five thousand dollars in bills. To this day the directors do not know where it came from.

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